Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

NOVEMBER 1-15, 1997 *Ken Silverstein & Alexander Cockburn* **VOL. 4, NO. 19**

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How GM (with Jesse Jackson's Help) Screws Its Black Dealers

Eleven years ago Richard Wallace was a Chicago police seargant on a promising career track. Then came an offer from General Motors to join the company's new black dealership program. GM's promises came fast and thick. On a personal investment of $65,000 Wallace would soon be reaping millions from a Buick dealership. Wallace was persuaded, quit his job and enlisted in the training program.

After a few months he confidently expected the dealership to materialize in his own hometown. GM said no. Even though, astoundingly, there were no black dealerships in Chicago or even the state of Illinois, GM told Wallace that he had no choice. The company was offering him a Buick dealership in Kansas City.

Wallace and his wife talked it over. She gave up a good job and they moved to Missouri. They put in their $65,000, and at once found themselves in a nightmare. The dealership was in one of the worst locations in town, and — GM had not volunteered this information — it had lost $5 million under its previous owner. Worse was to come. The rent subsidies and remodeling grants GM lavishly hands out to white dealers (one of whom in suburban New York received $14 million in low interest loans to redesign his store) were not forthcoming. Credit, the lifeblood of any auto dealer, was routinely witheld by the General Motors Acceptance Corporation when Wallace's customers looked for financing. Wallace tells us that this happened both to black and white people trying to buy cars from him, although white customers later trying another white-owned GM dealer in the area would usually get the loan. It wasn't long before his first dealership failed and a second dealership also in Kansas City was also imperilled.

An increasingly furious Wallace began raising a ruckus with senior GM executives. They dismissed his complaints out of hand. Wallace began to accumulate a file on the company's treatment of its black dealers, including 200 hours of tape recordings with the GM people, with other black dealers complaining of their treatment by the company and with customers jacked around by GMAC. Wallace also acquired evidence that GM management knew that the dealerships he was given had been the worst performing in the Kansas City area.

Wallace also found that a GM accounting executive named Jerry Wilson had spoken in harshly disparaging terms about him at a mid-level management session. As the quote was later relayed to Wallace by a white GM official, Wilson said, "This nigger won't be around much longer. The nigger failed in his first store, and he's going to fail in this one."

Perhaps a less robust character than Richard Wallace would have accepted GM's charge that he's been a bad businessman and that the failure of his two dealerships was entirely his fault. Wallace not only knew how GM had given him the poor locations, had denied him financing given to whites and had refused loans to his customers, but he was also now in possession of a truly damning file of calculated and brutal racism on the part of the largest company in the United States.

(continued on p. 5)

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Our Little Secret

Gore Kid Cover-Up

Al Gore's 13-year old son, Albert Gore III, lacking the safety valve of rap catharsis, was suspended from the swank St. Albans high school last year because he was caught smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol on school grounds. The reason you didn't hear about this is that the Veep frantically telephoned to friends in the Beltway press corps and pleaded with them not to report the story. His watchdog chums, including editors at Rupert Murdoch's *Weekly Standard*, speedily agreed. Meanwhile, the Stanford college paper fires a columnist for daring to write about Chelsea.

The powers-that-be at St. Albans — a $25,000 a year institution — did not report the case to police, so Albert III was spared the embarrassment of fingerprinting and having his mug shot snapped. Such courtesy surely would not have been extended to a student caught in similar circumstances at a school in one of Washington's poorer neighborhoods. Thus protected, Albert III has since transferred to Sidwell Friends, Chelsea Clinton's old stomping grounds.

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Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions,
$25 student/low-income
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Our Feudal Friend

Our Little Secret is no friend of the Chinese government, but the sanctification of the Dalai Lama is sometimes a bit hard to swallow. By our count, there are some 400 Tibet solidarity groups, many of them levitating well above conventional reality.

Before the Chinese invasion of 1950, Tibet was no Shangri-la. It was a semi-feudal society with the manorial estate as its core institution. Peasants were tied to the land as serfs and given only a small plot on which to grow their own food. They spent most of their time working on land that belonged to aristocratic lords, monasteries and individual lamas. Mel Goldstein, a professor of anthropology and expert on Tibet at Case-Western University, tells us that landowners had considerable legal authority, including the right to bring back peasants forcibly who tried to flee.

The Dalai Lama's exiled government is also not free from taint. It is said to be highly corrupt with a democratic facade concealing the continued influence of the old feudal elites.

You won't hear much about this in the current wave of movies and magazine cover stories that portray Tibet as Paradise Lost. The hero of the film *Seven Years in Tibet*, the Austrian Heinrich Harrer (played by Brad Pitt) who later became the Dalai Lama's tutor, was a sergeant in the Nazi SS. This inconvenient fact is omitted from the movie.

At the end of *Seven Years in Tibet*, a trio of vicious Chinese generals fly to Tibet to oversee the country's subjugation. As Goldstein points out, this scene could not have taken place since Tibet didn't a single airport in 1950 — other than the clandestine landing strips that the Dalai Lama had put at the service of the CIA for its anti-China activities.

The new Richard Gere flick, *Red Corner*, might have been made by the late Sam Fuller in his *China Gate* phase, employing racist stereotypes that portray the Chinese government as being far worse than the Nazis. About the Dalai Lama, Gere says, "He's the greatest living human. No one comes close." (Curiously, the Dalai Lama's favorite actor is John Wayne.)

Kundun, the pro-Tibet movie from Martin Scorsese, made Disney execs so nervous that they hired Henry Kissinger to help smooth any ruffled feathers with China. Disney President Michael Eisner was especially fearful that the Chinese might react by reneging on an agreement to allow his company to build a theme park near Peking.

At the same time, China's claims, repeated by Jiang Zemin during his recent visit, that it invaded Tibet to do away with the feudal system, is entirely bogus. For the first eight years of its occupation, China left the feudal order in place and tried to recruit local allies to rule the country for it. When that strategy failed, the Chinese began dismantling the manorial system and from that point on have pretended that putting an end to serfdom inspired the invasion in the first place.

Nike's Naughty Nanny

For five years Nike has widely touted its concern for the welfare of its workers. CEO Phil Knight says that Nike "is a family-friendly company" which shows a special sensitivity to the plight of working mothers. As evidence, in 1992 Knight invited the national press corps to attend the gala opening of the company's Joe Paterno Center for Childhood Development. Knight hailed the center, named after the Penn State football coach and longtime Nike spokesman, as the most advanced day care facility in the world, serving the needs of 165 "Nike children". In fact, the center is in the most elite suburb of Portland and caters mainly to Nike execs.

But now, fate has dealt the Nike PR department a cruel blow. On October

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28, CounterPunch received a call from a Nike employee that something was terribly amiss at Nike World Headquarters in Beaverton, Oregon. The head of the Joe Paterno Center, a 26-year old woman, had been summarily fired the day before. A technician discovered a large file of sexually explicit pictures on the director's computer. "It was all child porn," our Nike source says. "And many of us are concerned that some of the photos may have been of kids in the day center." The computer was handed over to the Washington Country sheriff's department, which confirmed to us that the hard drive contained "several shots of prepubescent boys and girls engaged in varying kinds of sexual acts with adult men and women". So far the sheriff has yet to determine whether any of the photos were of Nike children. The company did not return our calls.

DICK'S BACK, WORSER THAN EVER!

Those poor Republicans. Just when they're having a wonderful time flailing away at the Democrats and saying the campaign finance scandals make Watergate look like small potatoes, the spectre of Richard Nixon suddenly crawls out of the black lagoon and we're reminded of the great days when a genuine, 24-carat criminal inhabited the White House. The new tapes acquired under the Freedom of Information Act from the National Archive by Stanley Kutler continue the pattern set in motion by the very first set of highly edited Nixon tapes released nearly a quarter of a century ago when people realized with some shock that Nixon used a lot of bad language. "Expletive deleted" became a kind of national catchphrase. It's instructive how the Democratic Watergate prosecutors suppressed much of the truly damning stuff, in the interests of protecting "the presidency".

Here Nixon and Haldeman are discussing the money needed to pay off the Watergate burglars:

Haldeman: "It's in our cash in boxes. ... I think it's $300,000".

Nixon: "That isn't a hell of a lot."

By the spring of 1973 Nixon is told by the White House counsel John Dean that the price of the burglars' silence is a million dollars. Nixon broods, "You could get a million dollars. And you could get it in cash. I know where it could be gotten".

He was talking about Tom Pappas, a Nixon loyalist with close ties to the Greek military junta, which duly ponied up some of the hush money, as a way of buying American support, even as it tortured its opponents. If Americans had known this in 1974, it would have been harder for Gerald Ford to have issued that pardon.

MORE ON DARYL

As we learn more about Daryl L. Jones, Secretary of the Air Force designate and catspaw for the murky syndicate engaged in the Homestead Air Force Base scandal, the picture becomes ever less appealing.

The computer at Nike's day care center contained a large file of child pronography.

Now it emerges that while serving as an active duty air force officer in the early 1980s, Jones was in the habit, even while on duty, of pressuring enlisted men to buy Amway products. This was clearly against service rules, which for obvious reasons forbid officers from soliciting business from subordinates at any time. Jones' men complained to other officers, but when he was asked to stop, Jones merely gave what is described as a "dismissive kind of laugh".

Given Amway's habit of making big time contributions to both parties, Jones's involvement with the noxious company may have been politically calculated.

OIL TALKS

When the Smithsonian Institution ran an exhibit a few years ago that dared to suggest that the American nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were unnecessary, Congress went ballistic. Members savaged the museum on the House floor and the exhibit was hastily revised to whitewash the bombings.

A Smithsonian exhibit that opened in late October — "Oil From the Arctic: Building the Trans-Alaska Pipeline" — drew no such protests, though the history it offers up is rife with lies. That's no surprise, since the exhibit was paid for with a $300,000 grant from Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., the consortium that build the Trans-Alaska and that is comprised of Arco, British Petroleum and Exxon.

The exhibit portrays the building of the pipeline as a heroic, epic adventure, while ignoring the environmental destruction it wrought, as incomplete as describing Columbus's impact on the Americas without mentioning disease. The 1989 Exxon Valdez disaster is quickly noted in a timeline, but there are no photographs showing how it polluted 1,500 miles of coastline and destroyed sea otters, whales and sea birds. At a pre-exhibit party — attended by posses of oil industry poobahs and members of Congress, including most of the Alaska delegation — the pipeline consortium handed out a 144-page book of color photographs about the project. According to *Corporate Crime Reporter*, Bob Malone, the CEO of Alyeska, gave a speech in which he described the book as showing how the pipeline has "co-existed with the flora and fauna of this region for the past twenty years".

THE SMELL OF METHYL BROMIDE IN THE MORNING

In California, yachts have been replaced by vineyards as the favored tax write-off of the elite. It's an unusually toxic past-time, as is described in noisome detail in a new report by Patty Clary on the use of pesticides by the California wine industry. Clary found that one of the most toxic wineries was the Niebaun Estate Winery near St. Helena in Napa County, which doused its 170 acres with 42,120 pounds of methyl bromide. Methyl bromide is one of the deadliest pesticides on the market, posing a serious threat to vineyard workers, nearby residents and the ozone layer. The Niebaun Estate Winery is owned by the filmmaker and noted critic of Agent Orange, Francis Ford Coppola. ■

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Clinton's New Pals:

Algerian Fanatics Welcomed in Army Study

Is Algeria the next fundamentalist state? It looks increasingly likely. Even as the ruling generals claim that terror is on its last legs, civilian bodies are piling up increasingly visibly in the streets. Opponents of the ruling FLN are for the first time uniting in big anti-corruption demonstrations the capital, and international pressure is rising on the government to open talks with the Islamists.

No doubt prodded by companies such as Arco, Exxon and Bechtel (which enjoy profitable investments in Algeria's oil and gas fields), the US is readying itself for amiable relations with Algeria's fanatic Islamists, the same way it did with the Afghan Taliban, assisted into power by the CIA. A RAND report commissioned by the US Army argues the "Taliban option" in Algeria, as described below.

More than 60,000 civilians have been assassinated in the Islamists' war against their state. Almost every day women and girls are kidnapped off the streets and taken to be raped. The government annulled elections in 1991 and prevented the Islamic Front for Salvation (FIS in French) from winning power. But the various militia acting in the Islamists' name have overwhelmingly targeted civilians — not government officials — and even before 1991, women who broke the fundamentalists' edicts — frequented hairdressers, drank in public, traveled without male permission — were under threat. According to women's rights activists, the first attacks on women in the streets took place in 1987, long before any elections were canceled.

The most recent large-scale massacre took place at Bentalha on September 22. Around 11 PM, when 200 armed Islamists invaded this rowhouse community and started hacking people apart in their homes. Well-organized, unhindered, the guerrillas killed people until morning. As many as 600 women, men and children died, and not in simple ways. Survivors describe watching their husbands and grandfathers bound, beaten and disemboweled before their eyes; their wives tied up and slashed across the throat. Dozens of women and girls were seized, and then disappeared.

In 1996, the US Army commissioned a report from the Santa Monica-based RAND think tank to explore the implications of the Islamic fundamentalists coming to power in Algeria. RAND duly furnished the answer the US military strategists were clearly craving."Algeria: the next Fundamentalist State" the Rand report was titled.

Women murdered and raped? Mere "austerities of lifestyle" for RAND.

Its conclusion? "The West is ... almost certain to encounter the Front for Islamic Salvation (FIS) as a major player in Algerian politics in some form. It might, furthermore, well be able to live with a FIS regime".

According to Graham E. Fuller, the author of the RAND report, Algeria's "agony" actually opens some intriguing possibilities for the US. "The FIS is not necessarily likely to seize upon the US as the main source of Algerian problems or as the 'Great Satan' ", Fuller writes, contrasting the FIS favorably with Algeria's current ruling regime — the Front for National Liberation (FLN), the once left-leaning descendants of the party that threw off French colonialism in Algeria in 1962. "FLN ideology in the 1960s and '70s often portrayed the United States as the center of imperialism," Fuller notes sourly.

Then in one spellbinding paragraph Fuller manages to suggest that the religious rule of the FIS is about as fraught with peril as membership in a southern Baptist congregation in Arkansas. "In the social arena," Fuller writes , "The FIS will almost surely seek to impose a level of Islamic austerity as a way of life — in dress (especially for women), ban the public sale of alcohol, and censorship of films and TV. It will not oppose women in the workplace but may strive to separate them where readily feasible. It will probably adopt separate-sex educational institutions".

In some splendidly soothing phrases Fuller concludes that "there could be some nominal efforts initially to impose a few of the more draconian traditional Islamic punishments, but such punishments are not likely to dominate the penal structure for long." Fuller loiters to an equable conclusion. "All these austerities of lifestyle may be uncongenial to Westerners, and to many Algerians as well, but they are already familiar to many Westerners from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, etc. Adoption of these practices should be of no strategic concern to the West unless gross violations of human rights should take place outside the context of austere Islamic law."

"The US actually has an unusual policy opportunity to defuse a major moment in the evolution of regional Islamist movements: It actually carries little historical baggage in Algeria, and the FIS considers it more 'objective' than Europe about Islam."

Fuller argues that, unlike Iranian Islamists, the "FIS will display a realism about dealing with the economic order. ..." Which is to say, "The FIS is likely to welcome US private-sector investments in Algeria and to undertake close commercial relations with the United States."

The US is Algeria's second largest trading partner after France and, could presumably take over that premier position, given the Islamists' deep distrust of its former colonial rulers. Throughout the last decade, US corporations have been conducting profitable business in Algeria's rich oil and gas reserves.

There are many strains within Islamic fundamentalist groups in Algeria, with other groups far more fanatic than the FIS. Fuller may make his nice distinctions, but the US government is clearly positioning itself to do business with the sort of people performing the butchery of Bentalha. ■

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(*GM*, cont. from p. 1)

"As a Chicago policeman," Wallace tells us, "I thought I knew something about racism. It turns out I didn't know a thing until I ran into GM".

As Wallace saw GM kill his second dealership and faced the prospect of declaring personal bankruptcy, he continued to amass data on GM's record in minority dealerships. *Of GM's 8,234 dealerships in the United States only 107 are owned by blacks, 1.3 per cent.* As Wallace puts it, "Blacks may be buying 25 percent of GM's cars, but say we're off by 50 per cent. That still means blacks are buying 13 percent of GM's cars, but only have 1 per cent of the dealerships." And many of the dealerships that blacks own are in trouble. Only 16 of the black-owned dealerships are in GM's million dollar sales club.

There's an obvious question and we put it to Wallace. Why would it be in GM's interest to have its black dealerships go belly up? After all, GM is in the business of selling cars. Wallace offers this explanation. GM's minority-owned program allows the company to redline dealerships out of black communities and blame it on the "incompetence" of black owners. GM can also reward favored white dealers by selling them the assets of the failed dealership at cut rates. "After my dealership failed, "Wallace says, "GM sold it to a white dealer for ten cents on the dollar."

Wallace offers numerous cases to support this analysis and indeed the record shows pervasive racism at GM, which in the view of Wallace extends to the very top of the company: "GM's upper management simply turns its head from these problems. In fact they condone the actions of their managers. Senior executives don't take any action when they get repeated reports of racist incidents. This creates an intimidating atmosphere. Who wants to come forward when you're always hung out to dry? People stick their necks out and they get their heads chopped off."

An astounding incident ratifies this portrayal. In 1995, Steve Jones, a black GM manager, was riding in a company car with two white GM executives, Phil Wright and Lowell Andeson. They were returning from a meeting in Detroit and Jones was arguing the case for Eddie Stamps, a black dealer being slandered by the white GM managers for stealing money, a standard tactic — Wallace says — to discredit black dealers when they complain about GM maltreatment. Suddenly Wright began to bash Jones in the face with his fists, bloodying him seriously. As he threw the punches, Wright yelled at Jones, "I'm going to teach you a lesson, you black son-of-a-bitch. I'm going to beat your ass, you black motherfucker." The other white GM executive, Lowell Anderson, who was driving the car, did nothing and the assault continued until they got back to the hotel. Jones did not report the incident for a couple of days, waiting for Anderson and Wright to apologize. Finally he went to GM management, which fired Wright and transferred Anderson, telling Jones he had also been demoted, though in fact he held onto the same rank.

"As a Chicago policeman, I thought I knew something about racism. ... I didn't know a thing until I ran into GM."

Another former black GM dealer is Charles Bell, who had a dealership in Tuskegee, Alabama. Bell's business failed and he ended up suing the company, claiming it had discriminated against his dealership by not approving car loans for his customers. Bell furnished a study showing that his customers were 25 per cent less likely to get loans approved than applicants with similar credit profiles at a white-owned dealership in nearby Montgomery. In 1995 a state jury ruled in Bell's favor and awarded him $26 million in damages, although the Alabama supreme court reversed the judgement last year and sent the case back for a new trial.

Then there's Ronnie Blye, a current GM dealer in Atlanta. Blye is a former running back for the New York Giants who was lured away from a good job at Georgia-Pacific by GM. Blye says that GM promised him a great career that would earn him millions of dollars. They offered him a GM dealership in Deniston, Texas. It was only later that Blye learned that he would also be required to buy the former dealer's expensive house and that the dealership was located in an area that had just lost its biggest employer. "Everything they told us before we went into the dealership was about how much money we would make," Blye said. "But once we got the dealership, everything changed." Blye's dealership closed in 1992. It was sold to a white dealer for half the price Blye paid and the new owner didn't have to purchase Blye's house. "My biggest problem," Blye says, "is that I put too much faith in GM."

Wallace says flatly that the whole GM minority owned dealer program is "an elaborate fraud designed to hoodwink black Americans". He points to another brick wall at the company. "When black dealerships at GM fail, the dealers are basically out of a job. The only other position they've been trained for is as a general manager in GM sales, but GM isn't hiring any black general managers."

This summer, through a friend in Chicago, Wallace contacted Demetrius Patterson, a black reporter working for Gannett suburban newspapers in New York state, a small branch of the vast

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(GM, cont. from p. 5)
Gannett empire. Wallace outlined the situation and Patterson's editors gave him the green light for a long investigation, which Wallace understood would eventually be run nationally by Gannett News Service. In this expectation a number of black dealers agreed to tell their stories to Patterson. On one occasion Patterson sat in on a meeting with black dealers and GM management at the company's Detroit headquarters. In this session, as Patterson later reported, he took the opportunity of a moment when the GM white managers had left the room to ask the eleven black dealers present if they feared retribution for voicing their complaints. Nine immediately signalled that indeed they did.

On October 12, Patterson's story ran in Gannett suburban newspapers in Westchester County. His story, on which he'd worked for three months, was a long and detailed indictment of GM's racism, with abundant interviews. But those who had talked to Patterson say that crucial parts of the story were apparently excised, and they surmise this was after intervention by editors at Gannett.

Though the story was of obvious national interest and indeed potentially as explosive as the exposure of racism at Texaco, Gannett News Service never picked it up. (*USA Today* is a Gannett paper and its use of the story would have had a big impact at once.) The black dealers, now increasingly worried that GM will be able to pick them off without any public uproar, feel that GM, the largest advertiser in the country at more than $1 billion a year, was able to twist Gannett's arm. Lynn Fava of Competitive Media Reporting tells us that GM Automotive bought $69,125,000 worth of advertising in Gannett papers, including *USA Today*, in 1996. These same black dealers were told by Gannett that they need not fear GM's retaliation if they talked because the glare of publicity would be intense. But now Gannett has flushed it story down the drain. When Wallace protested to Gannett Suburban editor Nancy Blair, she said to him, "I don't know what you guys are complaining about. We put it up on the Internet." (Try http://nynews.com/daily/front12.sht)

The final blow to Wallace and the black dealers has been their apparent betrayal by Jesse Jackson.

Back in May Wallace and others had contacted Jackson's Operation PUSH, which has intervened in just these sorts of cases in the past with varying degrees of success, often in the form of a handsome settlement made directly to PUSH. Jackson was all enthusiasm in the spring and proclaimed that he was launching a probe into the charges laid against GM and other companies by the black dealers.

Three months after this announcement Jackson cut a deal with GM chairman John Smith, Jr. to have Weldon Latham of the Washington, DC-based firm Shaw, Pittman, Potts & Trowbridge conduct an investigation of GM's record. It seems Lathan, an assistant secretary of HUD in the Carter years, and before that at OMB in the Ford presidency, was Jackson's personal pick.

As the Gannett article neared publication, PUSH was alerted and the black dealers waited anxiously for Jackson to give their cause publicity with a stirring quote. Publication day came and went and Jackson was as quiet as a mouse. Wallace tells us he wasn't entirely surprised because he hadn't been able to get a word out of PUSH since August. Jackson hadn't lost his tongue entirely in those weeks. At the AFL-CIO meeting in Pittsburgh he'd railed furiously against economic injustice and it would have been a fine opportunity to get specific about GM.

Before CounterPunch went to press we called PUSH, which again refused to comment because "we're in the middle of negotiations with GM". Then we called Latham's office. Latham also declined to comment, claiming that the investigation was "confidential". Which indeed it is, particularly when it comes to eschewing any contact with the relevant witnesses. The two most powerful witnesses in the whole affair are Richard Wallace and Ronnie Blye. Latham has never contacted either of them. ■

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